

BOLD & BEAUTIFUL

A DESIGNER'S DEEP TIES AND IDENTICAL TASTE WITH HER
LONGTIME CLIENT ALLOW HER TO DECORATE A SCOTTSDALE
PENTHOUSE WITH LITTLE INPUT—AND HUGE SUCCESS.

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INTERIOR DESIGN / JULIA BUCKINGHAM, BUCKINGHAM INTERIORS + DESIGN
HOME BUILDER / RON BARNEY, RD ENTERPRISES LLC



Homeowner Sarah Nolan purchased several furnishings originally from show houses where her designer, Julia Buckingham, decorated rooms. The living room's vintage wingback chair, clad in a Coleman Taylor textile, and adjoining vintage Moroccan side table came straight from a show house in Lake Forest, Illinois. An antique barn crest provides a colorful backdrop.



Homeowner Sarah Nolan couldn't have predicted that the living room of her new Scottsdale penthouse would have champagne-colored swivel chairs with fringe paired with a peacock-print rug, or that the base of her kitchen island would be washed in gold leaf. But then again, after working with Chicago designer Julia Buckingham on four previous projects—and becoming close friends in the process—she never gave a second thought to how it would turn out.

Sarah, a Chicago native who uses the Arizona abode as a place where she and her four children can retreat from the harsh Midwest winters, had grown so in tune with her designer while working on her home in Winnetka, Illinois—as well as two downtown Chicago apartments and her mother's condo in Florida—that after an afternoon of choosing tile together for the penthouse floors, kitchen and bathrooms, she was content to let Buckingham do the rest. "There's a relationship between the two of us that is the most unbelievable meeting of the minds," Buckingham says. "Sarah likes things that are unique and special, which speaks so personally to my own aesthetic."

To begin, Buckingham brought in Gilbert-based builder Ron Barney, who had worked on the designer's own second home in Phoenix. As with Sarah, Buckingham's shared past experience with Barney was critical for the build-out of the Scottsdale penthouse, which had remained vacant for 10 years, never having gone beyond the concrete slab and studs. "Julia needed someone she'd dealt with previously, since she was remote and orchestrating much of the work from Chicago," Barney says. "We're a great team—she has the vision, and I have the ability to make things happen."

Buckingham enlisted Barney to enlarge the master bathroom, transform a bedroom space into a study and bar adjacent to the dining room, and anchor the living area with hefty built-ins surrounding an electric fireplace, another also resides in the master bedroom. Then, as Sarah likes to say, "came the fun stuff." She had already been storing away the contents of a dining room Buckingham designed for a Napa Valley show house in 2013, as well as pieces from another show house Buckingham did in Lake Forest, Illinois. "I'm not allowed to be near any of Julia's projects," Sarah jokes.

A Peacock Dark rug by Matthew Williamson for The Rug Company centers the living room, which features a Jake Raf sectional by Century Furniture—covered in both Schumacher's Glimmer fabric in Peacock and Kirby Design's Orion Velvet in Lagoon—a 1970s stainless-steel coffee table and midcentury volcanic turquoise lamps.

“MY DESIGNS ARE NOT JUST ABOUT ONE ERA, STYLE OR TEXTURE—IT’S A COMBINATION OF ALL THOSE THINGS.”

—Julia Buckingham

As it happens, the penthouse dining space perfectly accommodated the Napa show house’s custom round table crafted from an antique water mill wheel, as well as a colorful vintage light fixture that Buckingham found in Paris and an oversize contemporary art piece by Chicago artist Linc Thelen. Custom-designed pocket doors made from glass rondeles and a new rug with chain details pull the room together. “Julia’s like a curator—these found objects become pieces of art that you get to live with,” Sarah says of Buckingham’s trademarked aesthetic—Modernique®—which highlights modern furnishings and art with vintage, antique and rustic finds that give a room character.

Sarah had originally thought she would transfer many of her furnishings to Scottsdale from the Chicago apartment. But that notion quickly faded. “I wanted the Arizona home to be light and bright,” she says, noting the penthouse has sweeping views of Camelback Mountain, The Phoenician resort and the buttes of Papago Park. “I wanted to have more fun than just recreating my Chicago apartment in Scottsdale—to do something different.”

And fun is what she got. Those fringed swivel chairs are a nod to the West, but the glossy leather strips—fabricated by a dressmaker in New York City—go down to the floor like a flapper dress—without a cowboy in sight. Adjacent is a shiny black-and-white console that sits underneath an elaborate black-and-white paper cutout by Richard Shipp. “They’re so much alike, but also so incredibly different, which is the way I like to design,” Buckingham says. “It’s not just about one era, style or texture—it’s a combination of all those things.”

Buckingham went on to use a dramatic black-gold-and-white tile that she and Sarah chose for the kitchen as a foil for custom pendant lights made from smoky vintage Murano glass and Lucite bangles, which pick up the details of the carved-wood island base that shimmers in gold. In the master bedroom, the designer took a pair of green ombre velvet chairs Sarah saw in her showroom and placed them in front of a fireplace. Buckingham also employed a vintage carousel horse she had found on her travels in a bedroom for Sarah’s daughter—a competitive equestrian—as a nod to the white Arabian horses she boards nearby.

Through it all, Sarah kept herself in the dark about her designer’s progress. “I told her to surprise me,” she explains, “and when I finally walked in when it was done, I burst into tears because it just felt like I was home. Julia’s ability to put it all together is just magic.” ■



Buckingham designed the dining room table with an old water mill wheel gear whose edges echo the lines of the blown-glass lights that hang down in various heights. Buckingham also custom-designed the doors, which were fabricated by Door Works. Kelly Wearstler’s Feline fabric for Groundworks covers Kravet chairs; the wool-and-silk Lavalier floorcovering is from The Rug Company in Chicago.



The kitchen's tumbled-metal mosaic backsplash tiles from The Fine Line in Chicago were among the first design choices for the penthouse. Louise Gaskill fabricated the equally bold pendant lights; the vintage barstools are from Modern Manor. Counters are from Cactus Stone & Tile—polished granite on the island and leathered granite for the perimeters—top white-oak cabinetry fabricated by Desert Cove Woodworks.

Sarah's study does double duty as an extra entertaining space off the dining room, complete with a wet bar and wine chiller. A chandelier from New Metal Crafts in Chicago hangs above an antique table purchased through Buckingham Interiors + Design; the Andrew Martin Enquirer chair is upholstered in a Romo fabric. A zebra-hide rug sits over wood-grain porcelain floors from The Fine Line.



Below left: The bar's backsplash from The Fine Line reinforces the study's jewel-like elements. The cabinetry and shelving were fabricated by Desert Cove Woodworks.

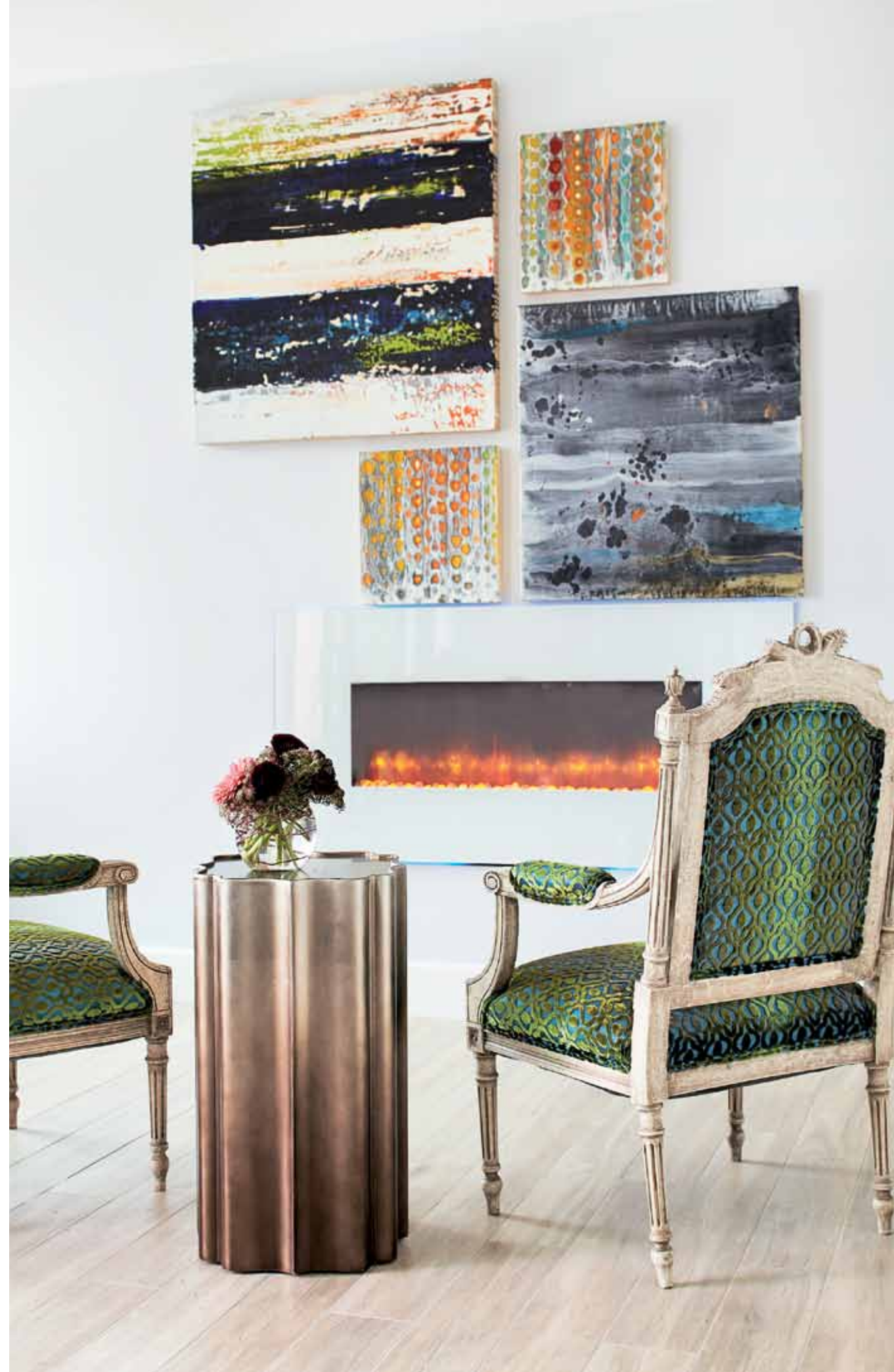
Below right: Three diamond-shaped iron sculptures from the Scott Estepp Gallery in Cincinnati connect the movement and color of an abstract watercolor with the iridescent Smoke and Mirrors console by Caracole.





Above: Bradley's tiered crystal Tori chandelier crowns the master bedroom; its golden tones are echoed in the wall plaques from Arteriors over the bed and the Gold is Up occasional table by Caracole. Paul Smith's Carnival floorcovering for The Rug Company adds a touch of whimsy.

Right: Buckingham paired the master bedroom's vintage walnut-and-brass nightstand from Red Modern Furniture with a lamp from The Find in Highwood, Illinois. The designer had the headboard upholstered in a microvelvet from Fishman's Fabrics in Chicago.



The homeowner spotted the hand-carved antique French armchairs, already upholstered in Opuzen's blue-and-green flocked velvet, in Buckingham's Chicago showroom. The designer juxtaposed them with modern abstracts by Lynn Basa. Builder Ron Barney had a glass-framed electric Simplifire fireplace, which features flames that change color, mounted into the wall.

Oomph's rectangular Newport mirrors in a soft blue hue add a quiet charm to the master bathroom above the linen white Kohler vanity with polished-marble countertop. Floors in a distinct pattern create interest.



Tile becomes like artwork in the master bath, where the material, in Mist Mosaic from The Fine Line, wraps a tub from Kohler, as well as a wall backing the faucet, also from Kohler. An abstract painting by Chicago artist Linc Thelen graces another wall.

“THE OWNER LIKES THINGS THAT ARE UNIQUE AND SPECIAL.”

-Julia Buckingham